

I Love Storytime

The best way to read to your toddler.

BY LESLIE GARISTO PFAFF

Give your 1-year-old a book, and you never know what she'll do with it: chew on it, bang it on the table, wear it on her head, or—surprise—sit down and start thumbing through it. By 12 months, most kids are book-ready: They've got the fine motor skills it takes to turn pages and the visual ability to understand detailed illustrations. And even if they're barely speaking, they can actually understand dozens of words.

"Reading to your toddler is one of the best ways to boost language skills," says Andrea Grimaldi, a senior program officer at the National Institute for Literacy. When you read, you're teaching her about the sounds and the structure of language, and helping expand her vocabulary. "Even the most basic children's books contain three times as many unique words as your child is likely to hear in everyday conversation," explains Caroline Blakemore, coauthor of *Baby Read-Aloud Basics*.

On top of that, reading to your child at an early age also improves her memory and attention span. And research shows that a love of books is the number-one determinant of future academic success. So, make sure your toddler gets a head start by following these simple steps.

1. ADD IT TO YOUR ROUTINE. Set aside regular times to read together every day. "You should aim for 20 to 30 minutes a day, in ten-minute intervals," says Sharen Hausmann, executive director of Smart Start, the early-childhood division of The United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta.

2. FIND A SOOTHING SETTING. Since toddlers are easily distracted, pick a quiet, comfortable spot for reading—and a



time when you don't feel rushed. "Make sure your spouse and older kids know they shouldn't interrupt you," says Mary Eames Ucci, director of the Wellesley College Child Study Center.

3. VARY YOUR READING LIST. For toddlers, reading sparks their imagination, satisfies their curiosity, and makes them feel at ease about new experiences, like taking a family trip or meeting a strange animal. The more types of books your child is exposed to, the more he'll learn.

4. VISIT THE LIBRARY. This will give her the chance to see other little readers enjoying themselves too. While she may be too young to pick out books on her own, try to involve her in the process ("Here's a book about a puppy. Would you like to read it?").

5. CHOOSE CAREFULLY. Look for titles that reflect your child's everyday experiences. In general, toddlers between 12 and 18 months tend to like books that ask questions or feature simple rhymes, while those closer to age 2 can appreciate more complex

★ *Rhyming books introduce your toddler to basic phonics, which will help her learn how to read as she gets older.*

rhyme schemes and story lines that involve basic emotions, like happiness and anger.

6. OFFER A SELECTION. Pull out several books at a time and let your child pick one or two to read. He'll be more excited if he's actively involved in the decision.

7. BE PATIENT. Don't be surprised if your child wants to read the same book over and over again. Toddlers learn through repetition. So bear with it, and try to add in a new book between readings of her current favorite.

8. KEEP IT FUN. To hold your child's attention, dramatize the story by raising and lowering your volume, varying the pace, and creating a unique voice for each character. "Speak slowly, exaggerate vowel sounds, and enunciate each word," says Blakemore. You can even mix it up by having your spouse read it with you.

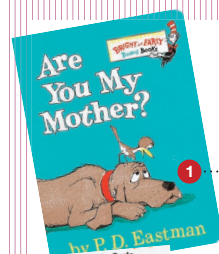
9. ASK QUESTIONS. Doing so keeps your child involved in the story and teaches problem-solving skills. Have your child look for things that are—and aren't—mentioned in the text: "Do you see the sun?" "Where's the bunny?"

10. LINK WORDS TO THE PICTURES. Reading to your toddler teaches him about the written word. Reinforce this lesson by pointing to a word as you say it and then pointing to the corresponding illustration. "Help your child understand that what you're saying and what he's seeing go together," says Hausmann.

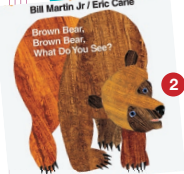
11. LET HER TOUCH. Give your child a chance to hold the book, and show her how to turn the pages. You'll not only be teaching her the basic mechanics of reading, but you'll also be enriching her mind. "When kids engage in physical activity while reading, they create more connections in the brain," says Ucci.

12. COAX A RELUCTANT READER. If your child quickly loses patience with reading, get creative. Experiment with different kinds of books to see what he likes. Does he pick books that rhyme? Stories about toddlers just like him? If he gets antsy, don't force it: Take a break, or try reading to him just before naps or bedtime, when he'll be most receptive to sitting and listening. With a little persistence and ingenuity, you'll teach him that books are fun—an attitude that will serve him well now and in the future.

10 Great Books for Toddlers



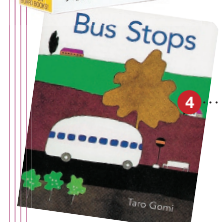
Are You My Mother? by P. D. Eastman. This sweet story of a baby bird searching for his mother will resonate with your toddler.



Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr. Your child will love flipping pages and guessing which animal comes next.



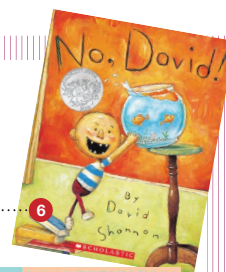
Boynton's Greatest Hits: Volume 1, by Sandra Boynton. This collection of four delightfully silly stories features the author's signature line drawings and simple text.



Bus Stops, by Taro Gomi. We like the basic but eye-catching illustrations and "can-you-find-it" prompts. Your child will want to read it over and over.



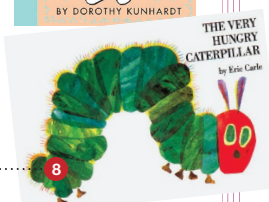
Goodnight Moon, by Margaret Wise Brown. Young children respond to this bedtime book's gentle repetition and detailed illustrations.



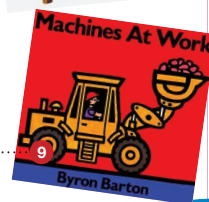
No, David! by David Shannon. This funny tale of an out-of-control little boy will draw in even the most reluctant readers.



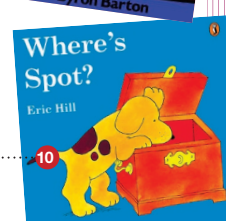
Pat the Bunny, by Dorothy Kunhardt. This hands-on classic asks kids to touch things (Daddy's beard, the bunny's fur) and to do things (wave bye-bye, try on Mommy's ring).



The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle. Brightly colored collages have made this a toddler favorite for more than 30 years.



Machines At Work, by Byron Barton. It's perfect for kids who like construction—and parents will dig its clever use of new words.



Where's Spot? by Eric Hill. A fun and eternally fascinating lift-the-flap book for little kids.